Middlebury College Organic Garden

Food Educator's Report for 2015

Internships

Through the generous support of alumni gifts and earned income from the farm's produce sales, the Middlebury College Organic Farm was able to offer summer internships to four undergraduate students: Karma Lama, Matt Barr, Jackie Kearney and Margot Babington (’18). We also hired 6 spring interns: In the spring and fall we hired interns Mandy Kimm, Hannah Habermann (’18), Ben Sanders (’18), Abbie McCerney (’18).

Student Projects

We began renovation of the original composting toilet, by removing and recycling the old structure.

School of the Environment

The opening ceremony for the second year Middlebury College School of the Environment was held at the College Farm in June. School of the Environment Director Steve Trombulak and many other college officials attended. The ceremony included the planting and dedication of a native Vermont elderberry seedling. Professor Trombulak has incorporated a tree planting ceremony at the organic farm to be a regular part of the opening of the School of the Environment.

Production Garden

Despite a late start caused by a very cold and dry spring our market garden produced sales equal to last year. Our goal is to leave the soil richer each year than the year before even though we are harvesting crops for Dining Services. We’ve developed a core group of crops we sell to Midd Dining that includes Swiss chard, kale, tomatoes, head lettuce, collards and basil. We grow at least 40 other crops for sales to smaller college venues and for Otter Creek Bakery. We also supply a large amount of produce for Weybridge House that is used fresh or preserved for winter use. Our goal is to grow a mix of diversified crops so the interns can learn how to grow many different types of vegetables, herbs and fruits. We also grow many varieties of flowers including wildflowers. We grow them predominantly for pollinator and beneficial insect food, but we also grow several varieties of flowers for cutting.

As in past year’s we grow specific crops to be donated to the H.O.P.E. food shelf in Middlebury. This year we brought HOPE green beans, lettuce, zucchini, carrots, butternut squash, cabbage and watermelon.

Intern field trips

Field trips provide an opportunity to see first-hand the diverse the type of crops grown by Vermont farmers. Each farm is also a very unique business using different approaches to sustainability. This season we visited Golden Russet Farm, Foggy Meadow Farm, the Elmer Farm, Lincoln Peak Vineyard, Shelburne Farms, the Intervale farm incubator, the Green Mountain College Farm and Windfall Orchard.

Reunion, homecoming and Fall Family Weekend Tours in 2015
The Organic Garden hosted a tour for alumni. Over 100 alumni came to our 2015 tour and open house. Alumni spent time with the interns and farm educator learning about the production methods of our garden. In the many discussions between alumni visitors and current students is the opportunity to connect past and present generations of Middlebury College students. We also run tours of the farm at Homecoming and Fall Family Weekend. Despite poor weather for the initial days of both these events, many interested family members and alumni toured the farm.

Classes at the Farm
Classes from the Psychology, History, Biology, Environmental Studies, Geology, Sociology, and Dance departments were held at the garden in spring and fall of 2015.

Research at the Farm
For several years the organic farm has collaborated with faculty members to create research opportunities for students. As part of each course that uses the farm for research students have opportunities to put theory into practice. The research projects are generated by the focus of each course and needs of the farm to learn more about our unique physical location and microclimate.
For the third consecutive year we hosted lab experiments for Kathy Doyle's ES 112 class. The summer interns planted and raised two different types of broccoli for Kathy's class to harvest and evaluate in late September. Students in the class harvested the broccoli, made measurements of yield for each treatment and evaluated other factors like soil type and previous soil treatment.
Vera Chan a senior biology major ran an experiment as part of her thesis.

This is the 13th year we've run seed trials at the farm. With a generous donation of seeds from Renee's Garden seed company we ran trials on new varieties of okra, spinach, tomatoes (several varieties) and calendula for pollinators. We also grew heirloom varieties of kale and sunflowers we obtained at the Eco Farm seed swap. The Hopi Black sunflowers were very successful and we saved seeds from our Hopi Black crop to trial again in 2016.

Visitors to the garden in 2015
During the summer we had several community volunteers spend time at the farm.
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